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ORGANISATION CHANGE, MANAGERIALISM AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT: THEIR EFFECT ON THE WORKING LIVES OF PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS IN THE UK

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ABSTRACT

The public sector is of significant importance to the quality of all our lives: it is tasked with educating our children, skilling our future workforce, caring for our sick and elderly and maintaining public safety. In short, it is premised on maintaining civil society through a constitutional settlement between the state and its citizens. The provision of such services within the public sector has been the subject of persistent change, packaged as a myriad of reform measures that have promised more, and better services, and "value for money" for taxpayers. Much of this continuous change since 1980, presented as marketisation and more recently as modernisation, has relied on neo-liberalist assumptions and prescriptions for service improvement. This paper draws together evidence from across the UK public services to present an analysis of public sector organisational change that has been observed and experienced. The argument is that these sustained reforms have been centrally concerned with solving the labour problem – low worker productivity and managers not being able to manage - in what are labour intensive services. The now familiar managerial discourse of empowerment and high commitment working practices is highlighted and express linkages are drawn between such themes and the day-to-day practices of performance and human resource management, seen here to be key levers in solving the same labour problem through a reduction in the quality of working lives of many public service workers.

Key words: public sector reform, organisational change, labour process, performance management, labour management

INTRODUCTION

The UK public sector continues to be primarily responsible for the provision of essential services such as education, health care, local and central government, fire and police. These services have been reformed within general neo-liberal aspirations in terms of their structure and financing, their organization and management, and their service orientation. The sector is highly labour intensive, and so any reforms have had considerable effects on the labour process of public sector workers and that change has been focused implicitly on solving the public sector 'labour problem' which we define in terms of low productivity, working practices being perceived to be restrictive and by managers feeling unable to manage. In essence, we feel that the locus of control in the labour process of many public sector workers has been contested and the implicit subject of reform. In this paper we first develop an evidence-based account of how solving this labour problem became one of the major methods used to explain and justify both the reforms and their shortcomings in the public services. We begin by painting a picture of change and identifying how this has affected the public sector under various neo-liberal regimes in the UK since 1979. Martin (2002), for example, argued that the plethora of initiatives that local government has faced has led workers feeling 'overwhelmed by the pace of change' (p.305), a point equally valid the entire public sector. Our aim is to explore the effects these changes have had on the nature of the relationship between different groups of public sector workers, particularly public sector professionals such as nurses, lecturers and police officers and what appears to be new managerial cadres created to oversee the modernisation process.

We explore how managerialism has pervaded the public sector and how this has been largely implemented through the development of performance management techniques. This has affected workers' experience of work as the locus of control over the pace and nature of jobs has become increasingly contested. The various agendas and rhetorics that have been used ('Public Choice Theory', 'New Public Management' and 'Modernisation') along with the actual performance management regimes have led to the intensification of work and shifts in the power balance between managers and professionals. Evidence is drawn from a range of public service contexts in order to identify the commonalities of experience of the changing nature of the labour process of this group of workers. Managerialism, therefore, is used as a convenient shorthand for that bundle of ideas and techniques which together are presented as the best practice for managing all resources more efficiently. Throughout the case is made that those professionals *qua* workers within the public sector are experiencing greater exploitation and more intense alienation as a result of both the realities of performance management and as a consequence of being subjected to the false rhetoric of heroic managers reconstructing service delivery on behalf of the benighted user. This requires, *inter alia*, changes in labour management (unitarist HRM), changes in the control over labour processes (unilateral Taylorism), and renewed efforts to

solve the state-inspired management-defined labour problem (relative low productivity of this group, Kaufman 1993).

We conclude with a discussion of the impact of change and assess the implications for the future of the public sector and the way that it is managed. Part of this concluding discussion throws additional light on how change has impacted on the role that the human resource management function has played in these developments, a function that has helped to change the interface between public service managers and those who self-identify as public service professionals. Managerialist and professional definitions of quality and service improvement remain unresolved and contested - as do notions of accountability, efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

MARKET IDEOLOGY AND "MODERNISATION"

Much of the reform process that has been implemented in the public sector has not been based on evidence that change would benefit those using services, those working in them and the community as a whole. A combination of political dogma (particularly the assumption that markets know best), private sector pressures from some powerful companies seeking low risk profits and a narrowing of the welfare provisions of the state (itself the result of loss of voice of large sections of the working class) have created the particular forms of modernisation presented by subsequent Conservative and Labour governments as best practice. Indeed modernisation has often been implemented against the popular democratically expressed will of users, staff and the wider community (Chomsky 1999).

Most of the services provided in the public sector are labour intensive (typically 70% of the total costs of provision are labour costs) and, as a result, any major systemic reform has had to involve, *pari passu*, a paradigm shift of the labour management system with both sides of the contractual market exchange (pay and performance) having to be addressed with the specific aim of solving the public sector labour problem. Hence the main policy themes witnessed over the years: the motivation of staff through bonus payments, promotions and the creation of so-called super posts; the motivation of senior managers through the creation of a well paid senior management team with loyalty focused on achieving central government's aims and objectives rather towards the staff who delivered the services and the communities that used them; marketisation, in which unit performance (e.g. hospitals and schools) was evaluated by coercive comparisons; and privatisation and outsourcing. All these initiatives aimed to improve the productivity and efficiency of labour through changes to the labour management system within a regime of management by target achievement (Colling 2003). It was as a result of these changes that managers increasingly shifted to a classic unitarist and unilateral decision-making style (Hood 1995; Pollit 1993; Walsh 1995) and the staff became increasingly alienated as the locus of control in their labour process continued to shift.

Integral to Labour's 1997 modernisation agenda (Ahmad and Broussine 2003) was a desire to managerialise the sector and to impose a 'new public management' (NPM) based on embedding the discipline of 'the market' into public services (Bach 2002: Ferlie et al 1996). NPM became the prevailing management nostrum of the 1990s: a central element was that public sector organisations should 'import managerial processes and behaviour from

the private sector' (Boyne 2002 p.97). NPM contained the notion that an entrepreneurial approach to public sector management (Lapsley 2009; Osborne and Gaebler 1993; Walsh 1995) using performance management systems and the discipline of the market, would, *ipso facto*, improve public sector productivity and drive up efficiency by sharpening individual and collective accountability (Hood 1991; 1995).

Under NPM, there was a move away from 'progressive public administration' based on professionalism, practitioner autonomy and limited management involvement in decision-making towards a model redolent of the private sector based on 'managers, markets and measurement' (Butterfield et al. 2005 p.330). Ironside and Seifert (2004) argue that this shift was underpinned by a deeper ideological belief in the perceived superiority of markets (and capitalism) over the hitherto received wisdom of state provision of essential public services (Dunsire 1999). Mather et al. (2007) argued that both the antecedents and consequences of such political shifts may be understood by reference to Braverman's (1974) analysis of the relationship between capital and labour with labour process theory offering a conceptually coherent framework that accounts for the impetus underpinning organisational change in the public sector and for its consequences on those working in the sector. Both Corby and White (1999) and Pendleton and Winterton (1993) draw on evidence from across the public sector to testify as to the impact this has had on public sector employee relations. The growth in performance management and target-setting surveillance architectures are logically consistent with the main tenets of Braverman as seen in evidence of the impact of this shift in public policy across different parts of the public sector. Hence change and resistance to change has created a mélange of managerialist and professional definitions of what it means to work in the public sector that warrants further research.

Consistent with the Braverman thesis, public sector workers are being put under pressure to work harder and longer in working environments that are increasingly perceived as autocratic with declining reciprocal trust (Worrall and Cooper 2007). Thus the locus of work controls has been relocated as power has increasingly shifted from professionals to managers with attempts to circumvent or challenge these controls, leading to politically inspired attempts to reconceptualise public sector employees as "knaves" rather than "knights" (Le Grand 2003 in Aldred 2008 p.34). This shift in control is not a straightforward process, but rather the mediated outcome of the dialectical interplay of management action and worker reaction in different public sector settings and between discrete public sector professionals. Some argue that there are limits to the extent of this shift in the locus of control (Dent and Barry 2004), but the broad thrust of studies highlighted in this paper is indicative of a general managerialist agenda to control key aspects of the performance of public sector professionals. Caulkin (2008) commented that politicians have "congratulated themselves on having disenfranchised one set of producer interests - the professionals" while "installing a more pernicious one in its place" (themselves) which "instead of making providers accountable to citizens, the new regime made them accountable to ministers and the burgeoning bureaucracy of performance management".

Consistent with the language of markets, notions of 'customers' and 'clients' have also been used as legitimizing devices within NPM discourse. Martinez Lucio and MacKenzie (1999 p.156) remarked that references to customers' interests had been used 'to develop a greater degree of managerial control over the employee within the public sector' and, as a result, 'work has become intensified through these new

management practices'. Studies reveal that customer and consumerist agendas – and, particularly, the rhetoric that supports them – appear to be used by service managers both to legitimise change and to stigmatise those who resist it (Clarke et al. 2007). Kirkpatrick el al. (1999b) commented that managers had assumed a more assertive and powerful role and a panoply of quality standards and performance indicators had been put in place that were characteristic of a Tayloristic approach to management despite a managerial rhetoric that appeared to argue otherwise. Similar findings are replicated in the work of Mooney and Law (2007 p.9) who reported that the reform of public services particularly since the election of a New Labour government had stimulated managerialist practices "to restrict the space that many welfare professionals once enjoyed to support services they perceived service users to require". They also went on to note, based on findings from hospital workers, teachers, university academics, nursery nurses, social workers and front line workers in the Department of Work and Pensions that this restricted "space" resulted in "a significant deskilling of work tasks" (ibid.).

Central to this customer and performance rhetoric is the important role accorded to quality management initiatives (Ferlie et al. 1996). These have important consequences for labour management practices with quality management and related developments such as Investors in People (IIP) having created 'a shift in the nature of ideological relations and employment processes' (Du Gay and Salamon 1992 p.157). There is a body of literature which argues that 'quality management' has been used as a technology to discipline the workforce (in a Foucauldian sense) with resultant negative consequences for employees such as work intensification (Burchell et al. 2002; Green 2001) and 'management by stress' brought about by increased surveillance and managerial control (Glover and Noon 2005 p.729; Korunka et al. 2003 p.53). In her study of NHS hospital nurses and 'new management', Bolton (2004 p.317) noted how NPM had 'gained control of the nursing labour process' and how hospital management had used Tayloristic techniques and the 'convincing discourse' of quality as a 'normative control device'. Korunka et al (2003 p.67) found that, despite rhetoric to the contrary, quality management initiatives had not empowered, motivated nor improved job satisfaction as all occupational groups had shown increased job strain and decreased job satisfaction 'as a result of the NPM introduction'. Similar outcomes have been observed in local government as a consequence of the modernisation agenda despite a ministerial spin that emphasises empowering local citizens and employees (Clarke 2004).

While the election of the Labour Government in 1997 did, nominally, presage a change in emphasis in public sector provision, namely the displacement of a reliance on markets as the means of delivering public services in favour of 'partnerships', Webb (1999 p.751-2) emphasised that the 'momentum of restructuring, cost control and performance indicators remains'. Despite the much vaunted lexical shift 'from competition to collaboration' (Entwistle and Martin 2005 p. 233) emphasising partnerships over markets, the overwhelming political concern with 'value for money' (p.239) and cost reduction has persisted. Several government papers have underlined this broad thrust of the modernising agenda, based on value for money, efficiency savings and cost reduction that have impacted on pay, job design and the job roles of thousands of public sector workers (for example HMCIFS 2001; HMC 2005). This was also clearly evidenced in the Gershon Review (Treasury 2004), The Agenda for Change in the NHS (DoH 2004) and the Bain Report for the fire and rescue service (Bain 2002). The TUC, along with most public sector unions, has sought to defend both the pay and performance of these various public service workers, using work overload, relative pay squeeze and attacks on "marketisation" and "modernisation"

(TUC Public Sector Pay Bulletins 2008). Likewise evidence presented in Pay Review Bodies' reports highlight the twin concerns of public sector pay and heavy workloads, as is presented in the case of nurses (DoH 2009) and schoolteachers (STRB 2009).

As Clarke (2004 p.496) noted, 'the New Labour Project is really about transforming social democracy into a particular variant of free-market neo-liberalism' in which competition and 'a renewed focus on performance and efficiency coupled with an intensification of inspection and scrutiny regimes' (p.497) is seen as the best means for securing efficiency gains and quality improvements. Indeed, HM Treasury extolled the view that 'effective markets and competition provide the best means of ensuring that the economy's resources are allocated efficiently' (Treasury 2004 p.28). This political preoccupation with efficiency and performance monitoring was also evident in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 2008 Pre-Budget Report, with the identification of additional efficiency savings of £5 billion by 2010/11 (Darling 2008).

The quest for service standard improvements, wrapped around notions of accountability and value for money, has been translated into expanding numbers of audit functions and inspection regimes to check on equally expanding numbers of targets and performance indicators (Hartley et al. 2002; Raine, 2000). A reading of the work of the Audit Commission, set up to ensure that each arm of the public sector is meeting its obligations to ministers (Kelly 2003), suggests persistent governmental preoccupation with government-led audits, all bent on squeezing greater "efficiencies" from the public services (Audit Comission 2008).

Conley (2006 p.53) emphasised the ideological continuity between the pre-1997 Conservative administration and the post-1997 Labour administration. She maintained that the Labour government's modernisation agenda, with its demand for increased flexibility, has had major implications for the structure of the public sector workforce, wherein modernisation and cost reduction agendas have led to the increased casualisation of the public sector workforce in a quest to achieve 'numerical flexibility' and to the increased polarity of the workforce into two tiers subject to radically different terms and conditions and experiences of employment. Similar restructuring exercises were reported in relation to nurses and social workers (Cox et al. 2008; de Ruyter et al. 2008). This, Conley argued, exposes a key contradiction in public sector employment, while the public sector has been at the forefront of diversity and equal opportunities and the quest to create a single status for public sector workers, it has also been in the vanguard of promoting 'flexible forms of working' through the increased casualisation of the workforce, thus demonstrating the dissonance between the rhetoric and the reality of modernisation. Although the 'single status' agreements in local government and the NHS had more to do with the privatisation of most manual functions and wage controls, than equality issues *per se.*

This same 'dissonance' is also evident in the introduction of the Best Value regime for local government. Ostensibly, Best Value, according to Boyne (2000 p.7), was introduced to release local government from the 'shackles of compulsory competitive tendering' (a regime based on market testing which led to the externalisation of many local government services). Ironically, the outsourcing of local government services has actually increased since the introduction of Best Value (Roper et al. 2005). Kirkpatrick (1999a) argued that the adoption of managerialist cultures had led to 'combative forms of behaviour' and an emphasis on achieving

short term results over the long term development of services thus making organisations less flexible as more informal, trust-based relationships were replaced by service level agreements embedded in formal contracts. Commentators like Boyne (2000 p.7) have also argued that despite its emancipatory and entrepreneurial rhetoric, the Best Value regime contained 'strong elements of prescription and pressures towards uniformity' as Ministers reinforced the drive to centralised control, conformity and uniformity by putting in place a system of external regulation to constrain behaviour and to improve the performance of local authorities principally through the imposition of performance indicators, audit and inspection regimes.

Rhetoric and reality, while apparently contradictory and incompatible in this case, are in practice part of the same legitimating process that state elites require to maintain both the reality of dominant practice and the illusion of democratic accountability (Miliband 1973). A central element of the Best Value regime in local government involved the development of no less than eighteen corporate health performance indicators and a further 104 service delivery indicators: this was remarkably similar to the performance indicator regime developed for the NHS (Chang 2006). Boyne (2000) noted how this regime had distorting effects on the behaviour of local authorities as they tended to avoid focusing on those aspects of performance not being measured by the 122 indicators, with many deciding to 'play the figures' by consciously distorting them. He concluded that while 'regulation is rife in the public sector….its tangible benefits are obscure'. Other examples of distortion may have had more far reaching effects: a recent article in the Guardian (7th July 2009) concluded that health service managers had "become obsessed by government-imposed performance targets" resulting in major lapses where safety had been pushed aside by other priorities – particularly waiting time targets

It appears that the promise of greater local control has been both illusory and disingenuous. Clarke (2004 p.497) noted 'Audit, inspection and earned autonomy sit uneasily with strategies designed to support the professions and raise morale in occupations such as teaching, nursing and the police that face recruitment problems'. Despite government ministers' 'rhetorical support for management devolution' (Bach and Winchester 2003 p.290) there has been growing centralisation over resource allocation and policy making with ministerial fiats overriding local democracy (Lee and Woodward 2002). When it comes to the crunch, as with the 2002-4 fire service dispute (Seifert and Sibley 2005), central government ditches any pretence of devolved decision making and takes over the operational reigns. The 'rhetoric' of modernisation gives the illusion of promoting local solutions while simultaneously adopting a centralising agenda that has increased the capacity of central government to control local services. Kurunmäki and Miller (2006 p.97) regard performance measurement as 'one of the key aspects of this centralising dimension' with public policy being reconstructed along rationalist management lines, 'based on the assumption that the process of calculation, measurement and strict control of the activity of workers can and should be used to manage the public sector more effectively' (Hewison 2002 p.557). Resultant performance management regimes have done much to redefine the relationship between public sector managers, professionals and politicians.

MANAGERIALISM, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

New Labour's agenda for public services is essentially premised on neo-liberal ideals (Bach and Della Rocca 2000; Nicolson-Crotty et al. 2006) and, underpinning this, there is an inherent belief in the benefits of "strong"

managers-cum-leaders to deliver performance improvements rooted in ideological unitarism that managers (and not “professional workers”) know and do best. Central to contemporary NPM ideology then is that managers, rather than professionals are best placed to define service delivery standards given that ‘for the marketisers, the professional, public service ethic is a con’ used by self-interested professionals ‘to force the price of their labour above its market value’ (Marquand 2005 p.3). This explains the proliferation of managerial forms of control (Townley 2001), the strengthening of line management and the increased emphasis on performance monitoring to engender compliance (Exworthy and Halford 1999).

Growing interest in performance management within the NPM literature may then be explained by its alleged status as a value-adding intervention which links people and jobs to the strategy and objectives of the organisation, with various ‘managerial planning, measurement and control techniques’ having been devised to facilitate this linkage (Mwita 2000 p.19). Unsurprisingly, recent years have 'witnessed an avalanche of performance indicators, performance reviews, audits and inspections in the UK public sector' (Kurunmäki and Miller, 2006 p.97) leading Jas and Skelcher (2005) to argue that 'performativity' has emerged as a 'central discourse within public management' (p.195) despite the fact that there is evidence to suggest that 'traditional models and approaches to performance management generally do not succeed in meeting their objectives, are flawed in their implementation, act to demotivate staff, and are often perceived as forms of control which are inappropriately used to “police” performance' (Winstanley and Stuart-Smith 1996 p.66). This can be somewhat paradoxical in an era when evidence-based management has been extolled as a virtue.

Managers seek to solve the problem of relatively low productivity among professional staff (one aspect of “the labour problem”) and, in so doing, invoke the three Es of NPM: efficiency, effectiveness, and economy. It is economy (cutting costs) that has been most readily imposed and measured usually in the name of efficiency. But this misses several points: efficiency is an input/output measure based on relative costs and therefore is both hard to measure accurately and has no logical or empirical link with cost reductions *per se*. In contrast effectiveness is achieved closeness to targets, and does not rely itself on either economy or efficiency. The workplace politics of this is that both users and producers want a more effective service (the ambulance arrives on time; a history graduate teaches history; the fire is put out; pensions are paid on time), but are less interested in whether the service is in itself efficiently delivered at least cost, that is the concern of government and senior managers. Once senior managers become the voice of government to their staff (and not as before the voice of their staff to government) then tensions mount, management becomes more oppressive and less accountable, and the service standards become the centre of contest and dispute.

The focus does then appear to be on greater management accountability to central government (Boyne et al. 2002; Kaboolian 1998) measured by the achievement (or not) of targets. This acts to further strengthen the management function and empower service managers to push through reforms as determined by ministerial dictat. Several studies have highlighted the widespread managerialism now pervading the public services reified by an increasing preoccupation with performance monitoring:- in the social services (Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd 2003a), in local government (Brooks 2000; Geddes 2001; Gill-McClure et al. 2003; Gill-McClure and Seifert 2008), in public libraries (Kirkpatrick 1999b), in the police service (Butterfield et al 2005; Loveday 2005;

Rogerson, 1999); in the fire service (Fitzgerald 2005); in further education (FE) (Briggs 2004; Mather et al. 2009); in higher education (HE) (Bryson 2004), in the health service (Givan 2005; Lloyd and Seifert 1995) and in the court system (Raine 2000). All these studies demonstrate the development of performance management systems that have led to the disempowering of public service professionals in favour of a newly empowered group of public service managers. While trends across the public sector have been remarkably similar (Kirkpatrick and Hoque 2005), the extent of change has differed according to the variable tenacity with which managers at different levels have driven through particular initiatives; by differences in the ability of discrete professional groups to resist change; by the particular nature of the reform process; and, by the difficulties managers have faced 'in transforming professional work practices in a context of rising demands on services' (Kitchener et al. 2000 p. 225).

The 'audit explosion' identified by Clarke and Newman (1997 p.80) has done much to shape contemporary public sector performance management approaches. This has resulted in increasingly onerous audit and inspection regimes (Kelly 2003) which have had the objective of creating standardised measures for services (Martinez Lucio and Mackenzie 1999) on the assumption that comparisons of the performance of public sector providers would 'ratchet up output or throughput' (Shaoul 1999 p.4). The emphasis has been primarily on output-based performance targets that express the quantity of service provided to various inputs, leading Legge (2005 p.270) to conclude that 'results for the general manager of a hospital often boil down to getting more patients through fewer beds at lower unit costs, or, in universities, to process higher numbers of students at lower unit cost'. With regards to the locus of control of work, it is interesting to note that some of the indicators that measure worker performance have been felt to contrast sharply with 'ideals of professionalism, where a doctor and nurse, can, by definition, always be trusted to perform at the highest level (Givan 2005 p.634 and 636).

While the government's stated 'performance culture' emphasises capacity building, leadership and management, it continues to be experienced by public sector workers as a 'measurement culture' of targets, inspections and auditing regimes (Harris 2005 p.683). This has led to increasing proceduralisation and standardisation in public service work as service areas are broken down into their constituent parts to facilitate the measurement and monitoring of costs and quality standards (Lapsley 1999 p.2009). As an example, the implementation of performance improvement targets in the court system have resulted in 'a more tightly defined framework of practice rules and regulations with a consequent narrowing of the scope for discretion by the judiciary and their support staff' (Raine 2000 p.392). Similarly, in the NHS, central government has attempted to 'initiate a culture driven by performance improvement' (Chang 2006 p. 64) through the development of a high level performance indicator (HLPI) system which has exposed health sector workers to greater managerial control over their working practices. Chang (2006) undertook a critique of the implementation of these changes arguing that the complex pattern of power relationships that exists between differing stakeholders (sic), namely strategic level managers, operational level managers, the professionals, "front-line' workers, service users and central government, within modern public sector organisations had not been taken into consideration and that performance management systems had been designed to meet the interest of one, specific stakeholder group (ministers) with the coercive power to ensure that its view was asserted over all others.

In this and other instances, central government determines what constitutes 'performing badly' and reinforces this by withholding funding with additional funding being allocated to reward good performance. It is not surprising that Chang (2006 p.74) reported central government performance indicators being construed as 'like a big stick to beat you up', arguing that many professionals sought to deliver the care that they thought to be appropriate 'despite whatever is in the NHS plan' (p.75). Implicit within this is the contested territory that marks the relationship between self-identifying managers and public service professionals. We feel that this challenge to and loss of professional autonomy has been accompanied by increased managerial control across the whole public sector. It is also our view that the rise of a managerial ethos has been accompanied by a deterioration in the quality of working life of public sector workers (Worrall and Cooper 2007).

The rhetoric of HRM would lead us to think that high quality employment relations are essential for the delivery of high quality public services, but the 'managerialism' that HRM practice enshrines has brought professionals and managers into conflict as the locus of control - where the pace, volume and quality of task performance are determined - has shifted from professionals to managers to yield a classic form of Taylorism (Taylor 1911). Shifts in control over "the job" and how it is performed have been brought about by the imposition of various overt and covert technologies of control such as performance management systems, quality management, customer-orientation and various HRM practices such as the explicit linking of personal appraisal with organisation level performance measures. The literature is littered with discussions of the development of a panoply of strategic human resource initiatives and performance management systems explicitly linked to the quantification, measurement and production of 'league tables' drawn from a myriad of performance indicators that have often generated the opprobrium of many public sector professionals (Geddes 2001) as schools, local authorities and health care trusts have been publicly labelled as 'failing'.

The creation of these very public 'name and shame' performance measures has created paradoxical consequences with clear 'winners and losers' amongst service providers and service users alike. For example, Loveday (2005 p.275) reported on how the Home Secretary and the Home Office had, in the interest of 'driving up performance' in the police service, identified police forces as 'failing' and how this resulted, in 2003 and 2004, in the quick removal of 'erring' senior police officers. This suggests that in the police service, as in other public sector areas, a failure to deliver on the central government agenda, as reified in performance indicators, has created an environment 'which serves to limit local discretion and which allows for no deviation in terms of local police procedures and objectives' (p. 276). Interestingly, organisations that are seen to perform well are promised the reward of increased local autonomy, less inspection and more resources while those regarded as failing are threatened with reduced resources and with being 'told that they will face more direct and intense centralist control' (Kurunmäki and Miller 2006 p. 98). In extreme cases, persistent failure can result in local management and local accountability being replaced by nominees appointed by central government, or by privatisation.

There is ample evidence to suggest that persistent, ideologically-driven change, accompanied by the continued growth of performance management regimes has adversely affected the quality of working life of public sector

workers. In particular, our concern is to explore how managerialism, which some have argued was premised on 'whipping the professionals into shape' (Pollitt 1993) has become reified in human resource, performance and quality management practices that have impacted upon the lived experiences of public sector workers. There is also ample evidence to suggest that the underlying drive to improve performance and efficiency has led to a shift in the locus of control of work for many public sector workers. Wilkinson and Lapido (2002 p.176) concluded, 'power has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of top management'. Such shifts of control indicate a move from professional bureaucracies typified by distributed and collegial forms of control to more managerialist environments typified by more centralised and coercive forms of control based primarily on positional power buttressed by performance management systems (Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd 2003a,b). Such shifts imply that fundamental changes have taken place in the work experience of public sector professionals who are now expected to perform to managerially imposed performance monitoring and measurement regimes that may not coincide with their professionally-determined standards, behavioural norms, judgements and value systems. To use the language of labour process theorists (Braverman 1974; Knights and Willmott 1990), this is indicative of a degradation of work for public sector workers. Despite the rhetoric of human resource management and its use of terms such as 'job enrichment' and 'empowerment' (Legge 2005), there has been an intensification (and extensification) of work (Green 2001), and a one-sided redefinition of the wage-effort bargain and reduced task discretion within a regime of increased surveillance and control. Empirical studies have concluded that empowerment does not enhance employee autonomy and that it is often associated with work intensification and a deterioration in the wage-effort bargain. Harley (1999 p.59) was concerned that "empowerment" had gained such currency in both practitioner consciousness and academic discourse 'in spite of the lack of any compelling evidence' that exponents of empowerment and 'the post-Fordist thesis' had the 'capacity to deliver on their promises'. Hales (2000 p.516) identified a more sinister reason why senior managers had adopted the rhetoric of empowerment arguing that empowering workers at the supervisory level was a technique to legitimise the delayering of middle and junior management levels.

Bolton (2004) found much support for the 'Taylorisation thesis' (p.323) in her study of nursing. In line with other public sector studies, she drew attention to the 'empty rhetoric' of managerialism and the facade of an espoused participatory management style by commenting that NHS strategic plans had appeared 'to offer empty promises of increased operational autonomy' while 'increasing the level of centralised control mechanisms' in an attack on nurses' 'professional autonomy' (Bolton 2004 p.318) and an increase in the 'performative control' of nurses (p.321). Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd (2003b p.525), in their study of UK social services, noted that social services professionals had vocalised their concerns about the inappropriateness of managerialism and the 'empty rhetoric' of managerial discourse.

In a paper on 'workplace incivility', Vickers (2006 p. 69) noted that much of the writing about the public sector had been overtaken by 'swathes of management rhetoric' about issues such as leadership, best practice, benchmarking, efficiency and effectiveness. She argued that much less has been said about 'the stuff of organisational life' that directly affects those who work in the sector and the often vulnerable members of society who crucially depend on the services that the public sector produces. Vickers identified a paucity of publications focused on what actually goes on in public sector organisations and how change affects employees'

perceptions of the organisations they work within, how it impacts on their ability to do their jobs and how it spills over into their lives outside work. She identified several causes of a deterioration in the quality of working lives of public sector workers including organisational change leading to increased workload; an increased sense of job insecurity; reduced resources due to efficiency savings; poor job design; poor communications; the increased use of temporary staff to increase workforce flexibility; the inappropriate use of 'faddish corporate initiatives' (p.75) such as business process reengineering; ruthless downsizing; cultural change that emphasised macho management behaviours and conflict; and the adoption of robust forms of performance management that recipients felt crossed the line into bullying and harassment (Lee 2002).

Vickers' findings resonate closely with Worrall et al. (2000a,b; 2007) who found that persistent organisational change had created an increased sense of job insecurity, reduced worker motivation, loyalty and morale but a much sharper sense of accountability due to the development of performance targets that were imposed rather than negotiated and regarded as unachievable. This is echoed by Kirkpatrick (1999a) who argued that persistent change in the public sector had led to work intensification, deteriorating terms and conditions of employment, more instrumental attitudes to work among public sector employees, declining morale, 'initiative fatigue' and a diminution of the public service ethos that had characterised the sector (Ranson and Stewart 1994).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have attempted to highlight the nature and impact of organisational change on those working in the UK public sector, though we have focused primarily on those who would self-identify as professionals and how their roles have changed compared to managers (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2003). Our concern has been with the ways in which the public sector has been increasingly ‘managerialised’ as the discourse and practice of public sector management has been reinvented in a vein more redolent of management as it is perceived to be enacted in the private sector. We have cited a number of studies to show that this has occurred at the expense of the experience of working in the public sector and we have attempted to show that all parts of the public sector have been subjected to similar forces that have led to wholesale restructuring, the adoption of different modes of delivering services, increased marketisation and outsourcing and the imposition of performance management systems and architectures.

NPM has been predominantly implemented ‘top-down’, it has been coercively imposed and linked to cuts in resources where organisations do not comply with ministerial agendas. The public sector is a relatively difficult environment in which to implement change as Edwards et al. (1998) found from six case studies looking at TQM and organisational change where the most negative results and the greatest resistance was found in public sector organisations. In many instances professional groups feel that they have been excluded from decision making (Kirkpatick and Ackroyd, 2003b: 526) and that NPM has been done ‘to them’ and not ‘with them’.

The introduction of a neoliberal modernisation agenda has created tensions in a public sector which Ranson and Stewart (1994) and Boyne (2002) saw as characterised by a 'public service ethos'. Ferlie et al. (1996) remarked upon the presence of strong and self-regulating professions in which professionals had stronger allegiances to professional codes of practice than to their host organisations as characteristic of the public sector. Indeed,

Bolton (2004 p.328) argued that nurses in the NHS saw themselves as 'the patient's advocate' often representing the interests of the patient against their own organisations. This is consistent with Redman and Snape (2005) who identified multiple 'foci of commitment' (p. 316) which were brought into sharper relief following a restructuring designed to change working practices to improve efficiency and quality but leading to increased pressure to meet targets and the increased monitoring and surveillance of both individual and team performance. Some have identified inertia and institutionalised proceduralism as characteristic of the UK public sector (Newman et al. 2001), while others have identified this as a barrier to innovation in multi-professional environments (Ferlie et al. 2005). Additionally, distinctive legal, fiscal, political and historical characteristics have led to the emergence of a public sector culture and communities of practice that value continuity in organisational practices, procedures and values over change and innovation (Stewart. 2000). So modernisers have been remarkably naïve. For example, Jas and Skelcher (2005) saw the history of public management in the UK as a succession of faddish, management ideologies often based around an inductively derived 'normative trait theory of management for excellence'. This implied that by adopting the best practice exemplified by 'apparently high performing organisations' (p.196) in domains such as transformational leadership, performance management, contracting, partnership building and competition, that less strongly performing organisations would be automatically transformed.

Mainstream HRM literature has been the site of considerable debate around the creation of 'high performance systems' or 'high commitment organisations' (Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Beugelsdijk 2008; Pauwe and Boselie 2005; Torrington et al 2006; Wood 1999). These HRM prescriptions can appear to offer attractive remedies for solving the labour problem in the public sector, with several studies revealing that the HRM function has become a powerful agent in the delivery of the NPM agenda (Bach 2000; Givan 2005; Gould-Williams 2004; Harris 2005). Kirkpatrick (1999b), in his study of university librarians, revealed that the job descriptions of staff had been redesigned and individual appraisal regimes had been more strongly aligned to the targets embedded in performance management systems. This process of alignment has real consequences for public sector workers as linking individual performance appraisal to wider performance management regimes has 'translate(d) the disciplines of competition down to the individual employment relationship' (Morgan et al. 2000 p.84). Barratt (2003) subjected the practice of HRM to Foucauldian critique, commenting that 'critical scholars have sometimes cast personnel managers as key agents in promoting ideologies which obfuscate the fundamentally exploitative nature of the employment relationship' (p.1071). He contrasted the ideological rhetoric of HRM with workers' lived experiences (Seifert and Ironside 2005).

The naive adoption of the patent nostrums of HRM has proved particularly damaging in the public sector as Jas and Skelcher (2005) argued, the adoption of 'currently fashionable elements of structure, process or culture will not necessarily produce improved performance': rather they see the improvement of service delivery as being contingent upon how change in the organisation affects 'interpretive schema', 'meaning systems' and the behaviour of actors at various levels in the organisation's hierarchy. They see behavioural factors in organisations as more influential in creating a climate in which workers can deliver high quality services than the faddish and insubstantial managerial 'truisms' that preoccupy much of the debate and discourse in public sector management. While some conclude that high levels of employee performance are associated with

employee commitment, motivation and trust (Den Hartog et al. 2004), others like Power (1996 p.7) have argued that the performance management systems in the UK public sector have focused primarily on creating compliance, discipline and control; have engendered low reciprocal trust and are often associated with 'less desirable governance styles'. Other authors have identified similar reductions in organisational commitment, loyalty and morale by public sector workers (Bryson, 2004b: 40; Gill-McClure et al. 2003; Worrall and Cooper 2007).

Consequently, despite the rhetoric about building empowerment, job enrichment and creating high commitment organisations, HRM offers a controlling and disciplining labour management device within the public sector that is integral to the delivery of the NPM agenda. Bach (2002 p.629) links the modernising agenda to the redefinition of pay systems and change in working practices – both core HRM activities - which 'in turn are linked to an emphasis on output targets, business performance indicators and league tables'. Modernising working practices therefore becomes part of the package for stimulating efficiency and quality improvements. An example is the implementation of role redesign programmes as part of the broader workforce modernisation agenda in the NHS. These have involved skills–mix changes, 'job widening', 'job deepening' and new role creation 'to improve efficiency and service quality', while challenging professional role demarcations within the service (Hyde et al. 2005 p. 699). The same study revealed that professional groups within the NHS attempted to resist what they perceived to be the degradation of their own labour process as aspects of their work were reallocated to less qualified, less unionised - and cheaper - workers. Labour cheapening strategies have also been found in other parts of the public sector, Mather et al. (2007) reveal how contracts were rewritten and imposed upon FE lecturers by senior management with those failing to accept new contracts being disallowed pay increases or being forced to accept the new contract if they wanted promotion. They argued that the imposition of the so-called 'professional contract' was something of a semantic twist, in that most lecturers saw the contract as having been designed to de-professionalise them by reducing their autonomy while simultaneously intensifying and extensifying their work.

Parker and Jary (1995) and Bryson (2004a) commented that the process of managerialisation had been underpinned in HE by the adoption of a range of strategic human resource management techniques such as performance appraisal and the tighter definition of roles to sharpen accountability. Bryson (2004a,b) argued that many academics had experienced substantial work intensification, deteriorating autonomy, worsening conditions of employment, casualisation through the use of fixed term contracts, and more overt surveillance and control as a consequence of the imposition of teaching and research quality assessment regimes. In similar vein, Bach at al's (2006) study of changing job boundaries gave a detailed exposition of the increased reliance placed on teaching assistants (TAs) which caused teachers to be 'sensitive to alterations in occupational boundaries' adding that this sensitivity 'arose less from a sense that TAs posed a threat to their role as teachers' but 'more from a desire to ensure that TAs adopted and implemented the same professional norms as they applied in the classroom' (p.20). These studies reveal the centrality of changes in work organisation to the government's modernisation agenda which may explain an increased reliance on temporary and fixed term contract workers demonstrating the 'unambiguous casualisation of some parts of the public sector workforce' (Doogan 2001; Morgan et al. 2000 p.91; de Ruyter et al. 2008).

Boyne (2002) argues that the 'dominant view in the public policy and administration literature' is that public and private sector organisations are so different that the prescriptions of NPM are inappropriate. The importation of private sector forms of management into the public sector has led to the creation of a system of practices redolent of Taylorism that we regard as inappropriate and injurious to workplace relations. Various central government agendas have sought to transform public sector organisations into organisational forms more akin to those found in the private sector by imposing the rigours of the market; by creating quasi-markets based on separating 'purchaser' and 'provider' functions within previously unified service delivery organisations; by developing performance management, control and surveillance regimes; and, by importing managerialist behaviours and cultural forms which have led to direct conflict and contestation between a newly created breed of 'born-again' managers and longer established professionally-based groups and communities of practice.

There is no compelling evidence that the much-vaunted efficiencies have been generated and that while some organisations may have superficially complied with ministerial fiats, the efficiency agenda has not pervaded the deep structures, cultures and value systems of many public sector organisations (Lapsley 1999). More worryingly, the same efficiency agenda has had profound consequences for the nature and experience of public sector employment as Bewley (2005 p.368) concluded from her review of public sector employment under New Labour, 'job security was clearly secondary to efficiency targets'. Other researchers have argued that in organisations as complex as public sector organisations, a 'negotiated order' emerges reflecting the 'mediation of professional identity and autonomy with the pressures induced by market rationality, managerial control and technological change' (Doolin 2001 p.250). It is possible that negotiated orders have a much higher likelihood of succeeding than imposed orders supported by performance management regimes of dubious validity and reliability. As Caulkin (2008 p.11) argues, "Real reform and real savings can only begin when the deliverology regime is swept away. Trying to reform it from the inside, using the measures and controls that got us into this mess, is a logical absurdity".

Even SOLACE (The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) has published work that has pointed to "the pernicious effects of central Government's command and control regime" (Buxton 2009, p3) and have cited various examples from within local government of how central Government directives have actually worsened services and driven up costs as targets have stimulated behaviours in managers that have focused on speed in delivering services and on quantity rather than on the quality of service provided. Yet despite this evidence that centralisation, command and control do not work, there are real concerns in an era when the call for public sector spending cuts is becoming louder, that the nostrums (that is medicines sold with false or exaggerated claims) of central Government and their legions of performance managers will be applied with even more assiduity.

It would seem that in a contradictory environment trying to solve the labour problem of public sector professionals through unilateral job controls based on unitarist ideologies wrapped in norms of performance management set by central government has failed in the past and will fail in the future. With severe financial constraints and hard cuts on the horizon which will involve both job cuts and pay standstills, it is difficult to see

how service quality can be maintained without another push towards controlling professional labour ever more tightly in the disguise of a greater efficiency aimed at solving the problem of labour without recourse to the labourers themselves. Seddon (2009) argued that "we need to rid ourselves of the specifiers, who dream up bad ideas, and inspectors who ensure compliance": like Seddon, we feel that progress will only be made when those who deliver the services are made responsible rather than compliant.

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